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Language during the elections for the European Parliament : the case of Poland

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Kazimierz Ożóg

**LANGUAGE DURING THE ELECTIONS
FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
(THE CASE OF POLAND)**

The breakthrough of 1989, when – owing to the bloodless Solidarity revolution – Poland regained its freedom, means many epochal changes in various areas of the nation's life, including the institution of new language to refer to public affairs (the language of politics). The language serves public activity of citizens related to the functioning of the state, exercising political authority, taking and justifying political decisions, law-making, current activities of Parliament, president and other organs of political power, functioning of political parties, local government, electoral campaigns etc. Research on the language of politics in the Third Republic has advanced recently. There are several extensive books and many press publications on the topic¹. Linguists involved in the research agree that the language both describes reality, expressing basic axiological premises of a given party, and serves as a powerful tool of persuasion targeted at citizens. It aims to make them support proposed solutions, adopt new ideas, views or value systems. Predominantly owing to its persuasive function, language is used by political parties to win and maintain power².

¹ See: J. Anusiewicz, B. Siciński (eds), *Język polityki a współczesna kultura polityczna*, „Język a kultura”, vol. 11, Wrocław 1994; J. Bralczyk, *O języku polskiej polityki lat osiemdziesiątych i dziewięćdziesiątych*, Warszawa 2003; I. Borkowski, *Świt wolnego słowa. Język propagandy politycznej 1981–1995*, Wrocław 2003; I. Kamińska-Szmaj, *Słowa na wolności. Język polityki po 1989 roku – wypowiedzi, dowcip polityczny, słownik inwektyw*, Wrocław 2001; K. Ożóg, *Język w służbie polityki. Językowy kształt kampanii wyborczych*, Rzeszów 2004.

² See: K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska, T. Zgółka (eds), *Język perswazji publicznej*, Poznań 2003.

The study of the language of contemporary politics is important not only for linguistics and social sciences (social psychology, sociology, politology). It is also beneficial in cognitive terms for the language covers an extensive area of social activities undertaken by individuals, groups, parties and associations. To do research on the area is to make a diagnosis of a kind referring to the state of the society since it touches upon the sphere of various ideas, convictions, attitudes and frustrations³. A practical dimension is also important in the research since studies into the political Polish provide both politicians and ordinary citizens with relevant information on how to perform effectively in the public sphere assisted by language. The research reports are useful for citizens because they reveal mechanisms of populism, manipulation and demagoguery which are dangerous for political life⁴.

1 May 2004 makes a special date in the history of Poland. The Third Republic earned full membership in the European Union, following prolonged negotiations. Our accession to the Union was concurrent with the first political campaign preceding elections to the European Parliament in Poland. Voting in favour of eurodeputies – since such a term prevailed over other terms – was set on 13 June 2004. 1887 candidates listed on 21 lists of electoral committees competed for 54 parliamentary seats. The present paper contains a few remarks concerning the linguistic aspects of the campaign. The analysis is based on a rather extensive body of documents which were collected during the campaign (May, June 2004). The collected data include various types of electoral manifestos, leaflets, special issues of dailies, radio and tv advertisements, interviewes and announcements published in the press.

It is extremely interesting to analyse the electoral documents since on one hand the texts are full of attractive ideas, invoke great values, are based on axiological principles of the given candidate or the given party. On the other hand, they make use of advertising mechanisms (called here political marketing) aiming to „sell” the given idea or person. It is very interesting to watch how the great values, pompous slogans and their promotion, pure advertising collide⁵. Every electoral

³ See: K. Skarżyńska (red.), *Podstawy psychologii społecznej*, Poznań 2002.

⁴ See a chapter of the cited book by J. Bralczyk, entitled *On linguistic populism*, p. 85–92.

⁵ See: W. Cwalina, *Telewizyjna reklama polityczna*, Lublin 2000; A. W. Jabłoński, L. Sobkowiak (eds), *Marketing polityczny w teorii i praktyce*, Wrocław 2002.

campaign is accompanied by multiplicity of persuasive attempts; the main responsibility for attracting voters rests with language, however. The success or failure of candidates and parties frequently depend on their ability to create effective texts which justify well (in an attractive manner) that the *candidate X is worthy of voting for*.

Below a few indicators of mechanisms used in the electoral campaign will be discussed. The indicators include: praising the candidate, electoral slogans, electoral promises, value-flavouring, carnivalization of electoral behaviour and elements of positive campaigning contrasted with negative campaigning. (Attention: lines in italics and numbered examples are part of the collected database which contains hundreds of such pieces).

Successful electoral promotion is to a large degree premised on effective praising of the candidate, creating his positive image.

(1) *G. L. ranked third on the list no 4 – no party membership. He is 54. Although he was getting ready to play the role of a miller at the Mielec WSK, the fate took him to a playing field. Football has become the love of his life forever. In the years 1971 – 84 he was a member of the Polish national team. Wearing a T-shirt with an image of the eagle on his breast, he played 104 matches, scoring 45 goals. A golden medal winner at the Olympic Games in Munich and of the silver medal in Montreal. Three times participated in the World Championships and [became] the king of snipers during the World Championships in Germany.*

During the first European campaign, the candidates were primarily praised for their pragmatic skills: effective political or local government activity, experience, competences, higher level of education (including academic degrees), command of foreign languages, versatility in European institutions. In a manner that was tiresome for an average voter, a long at times enumeration of formerly performed functions or occupied positions was provided. It might be concluded that the candidates supposed that such an enumeration had a significant persuasive power to make people vote for X, cf:

(2) *K. R. – 52, entrepreneur, vice-president of Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej in the podkarpackie voivodeship, vice-president of Związek Zawodowy Rolnictwa „Samoobrona RP” in Podkarpacie. A lawyer, he graduated from the Faculty of Law and Administration, a branch of UMCS in Rzeszów. Postgraduate studies in European inte-*

gration at Rzeszów University. Plenipotentiary of the foreign company ITARES, President of Polish-Slovak Economic Chamber, member of the Programming Council of Radio Rzeszów SA, member of Rada Ławnicza Okręgowego Sądu Pracy i Ubezpieczeń Społecznych. A hunter, member of a military Hunting Society no 134 at 21 Brygada Strzelców Podhalańskich, initiator of many cultural and economic initiatives in Podkarpacie.

Tellingly, the motive of effective lobbying for the region as a praiseworthy skill of the candidates appeared frequently during the campaign. They praised themselves for being able to move within the Union power structures, which would enable them to win money for the community, cf:

(3) *The European Parliament consitutes a new challenge. Thanks to personal contacts – intellectual, political and financial elite plays bridge – fair command of English and French as well as basic German and Italian I will be able to lobby for the interests of Podkarpacie effectively.*

The electoral data frequently contain instances when a candidate is praised by other individuals. In this case the candidates often do not tone down their promotion activities either. At times a single text contains several praises of X who is praised by representatives of various milieux, individuals well known and totally unknown, ordinary people, cf:

(4) *A.B. is a very good man, tried in effective work for the Polish society and the region from which he comes. I know him as an extraordinarily diligent and competent parliamentarian, taking care of the best legislative solutions for each Pole.* [Janusz Wojciechowski, president of PSL [Polish Peasants' Party], vice-Speaker of the Sejm praises the candidate).

(5) *Darek accompanies us from the beginning. Always in the first row. Each task is a challenge for him, which he faces and deals with in an energetic manner. I know he will represent your region in the European Parliament effectively.* (Praises the candidate professor Zyta Gilowska).

Electoral slogans play an important role in every electoral campaign. The short, pinpointed, content-closed formulas are believed to make powerful persuasive impact. Slogans may appear separately, eg. on walls, special posters, billboards, or, more often, they accompany other electoral texts. Every electoral catch-word – since such a name is also used by the organizers of the campaigns – performs a few im-

portant functions, of which the programmatic function – a catchword showing most catchy, according to its creators, elements of the programme and the function of integrating a group around the indicated idea⁶ are most essential. In the analyzed campaign there were only a few catchy slogans; rarely slogans referred to the new European reality. The majority of the formulas were related to Polish issues. Let us compare some of the examples: *Ważniejsza jest Polska* [Poland is more important] by Liga Polskich Rodzin [Polish Families League]; *Godna reprezentacja w Europie* [Honorable representation in Europe] by Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice]; *Wykorzystajmy europejską szansę* [Let us take advantage of the European opportunity] by Socjaldemokracja Polska [Polish Social-Democrats]; *Europa dla rozwoju, rozwój dla Polski* [Europe for development, development for Poland] by Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej [Left Democratic Alliance]; *Wybieramy biało-czerwonych* [We choose the white-red] by Samobrona [Self-defence]; *Wybieraj ludzi, bo ludzie będą reprezentować nasze interesy w Unii Europejskiej* [Choose people for people will be representing our interests at the European Union] by Narodowy Komitet Wyborczy [National Electoral Committee]; *Zadbamy o Polskę* [We will take care of Poland] by Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe [Polish Peasants' Party]; *Europa równych szans* [Europe of equal opportunities] by Polska Partia Pracy [Polish Party of Labour]; *Przyszłość i doświadczenie* [Future and experience] by Unia Demokratyczna [Democratic Union]; *Patriotyzm gospodarczy* [Economic patriotism] by Inicjatywa dla Polski [Initiative for Poland]. An interesting slogan was suggested by Polish bishops supporting moderate euro-enthusiasts – *Z nadzieją w zjednoczonej Europie* [With hope in the united Europe]. Some of the slogans proposed by particular candidates could appear in any electoral campaign, being so general or expressive of the basic axiological system of a party or a candidate, cf.: *Dla Polski i dla Regionu* [For Poland and for the Region]; *Odwaga, Uczciwość, Wiarygodność* [Courage, Honesty, Reliability]; *Chcę dać młodym nadzieję* [I want to give hope to the young]; *Patriotyzm gospodarczy* [Economic patriotism]; *Moją dewizą – myśleć globalnie, działać lokalnie* [My motto – think globally, act locally]; *Od rozwoju do rozwoju* [From development to development]; *Godna emerytura i renta – Mniejsze podatki – Bezpieczeństwo* [Decent pension and benefits for the disabled – Lower taxes –

⁶ Cf. M. Kochan, *Slogany w polityce i reklamie*, Warszawa 2002.

Security]. There were many slogans of emotional character, grand declarations, lofty appeals, cf: *Ojczyzny nie zdradzę nigdy!* [I shall never betray my home country!]; *Więcej dla Polski!* [More for Poland]; *Po-lacy! Odwagi!* [Poles! Have courage!]; *Aby Polska Polską była! ... na-wet w Unii Europejskiej* [Let Poland Poland be! ... even in the European Union]; *Przebojem w Europę!!!* [Go-get in Europe]; *Zadbajmy o Państwo Polskie i jego suwerenność!* [Let us take care of the Polish State and its sovereignty]; *Dość za nas bez nas!!!* [Enough instead of us for us!!!].

Promises are an important part of any electoral campaign. During the campaign there were also many promises made. Each electoral promise is a temptation of a kind targeted at a voter. It entails an official confirmation that operations which are advantageous for the group (community) within which the candidate functions and to which he appeals will be performed. Voters' benefits are crucial in any electoral promise. At this point the issue of insincerity in making the promises is raised⁷. The majority of electoral promises, even when the promise-maker's intentions are good, are not possible to implement. A question should be asked why then in every electoral campaign so many insincere promises are made. In my opinion, a simple mechanism operates here: paradoxically, the more is promised, the greater the persuasive power of the promises. They must express sub-conscious cravings of many voters who often wonder whether a given promise could be kept. Impressive promises, stressing benefits that might result if X is elected, might attract many supporters at a given moment. This happens especially when they are frequently repeated. Promises switch on mechanisms of emotional reception of communicated messages⁸.

Electoral promises made during the first Polish campaign for the European Parliament were mainly related to domestic affairs, or rather regional ones. Frequently, candidates (political parties, electoral committees) did not hide that they treated the elections as a preliminary phase of the future national parliamentary elections. Let us compare

⁷ According to J. R. Searle's a promise is premised on several conditions to constitute a sincere promise, cf. J. R. Searle, *Czynności mowy. Rozważania o filozofii języka*, Warszawa 1987, esp. Sub-chapter *Jak obiecywać w sposób złożony*, p. 77–82.

⁸ S. Barańczak wrote about it in: *Słowo – perswazja – kultura masowa*, „Twórczość” 1975, i. 7, p. 46–57.

a few of such very general electoral promises. *I promise, we promise* the following then:

(6) *to remedy the Polish political life radically, the program of sanation is included in the „Program przyzwoitości władzy publicznej”;*

(7) *work in favour of strong and good authorities, Poland must be ruled well;*

(8) *to fight at the European Parliament for structural funds for Poland and Podkarpacie, to take care of the development of Poland and Podkarpacie, to take care of European financial means for Podkarpacie, an increase of economic development of Poland and our Region, broaching issues important for Poles within the framework of the EP, raising the quality of life, especially of the poor.*

All of the enumerated promises are deeply populist. Such insincere promises were plentiful during the campaign, cf: *we promise: to lower taxes, to increase pensions and benefits for the disaded, to get rid of unemployment.* Similar or identical promises were made by various candidates. Both formal models⁹ and the very object promised were recurrent, cf: *While at the EP, I promise to work for the region; I will fight for assistance funds for Podkarpacie; I support re-negotiation of the Accession Treaty.* Promises related to the position of Poland in the European Union were curious. The differences between euro-enthusiasts and euro-sceptics were visible at this point. Supporters of the Union promise deepening of integration while its opponents in their radical promises mention re-negotiation of the principles of accession or even Polish secession from the Union:

(9) *I strongly oppose the European Constitution which worsens Poland's position within the EU. I am against a European state dominated by Germany and France. I am in favour of a Europe of Nations which is based on the foundation of spiritual heritage and Christian ethics.*

Some researchers focused on electoral campaigns claim that results of elections are greatly influenced by emotional voting. The campaigns aim at arousing either positive or negative emotions of voters. Positive emotions are to support the given candidate, while negative emotions are to help the voter reject other candidates (electoral programmes).

⁹ I built formal models of the electoral promise in a book devoted to the language of electoral campaigns: K. Ożóg, *Język w służbie polityki...*

During the analyzed campaign, positive emotions prevailed, which appeared in many emotional slogans as well as in references to emotionally catchy Polish national symbols, religious symbols and Polish cultural signs. Grand, universal values¹⁰ were invoked frequently, cf: *Z polskiej ziemi polski chleb* [Polish bread from the Polish land]; *Nie rzucim ziemi, skąd nasz ród* [We will not give up the land where our nation comes from]; *Postawiłem na uczciwość, prawdę i Polskę* [I banked on honesty, truth and Poland]; *tożsamość narodu; niezawisłość Polski; dialog w prawdzie i wolności; narodowa godność; godność i podstawowe prawa człowieka* [the identity of the nation; independence of Poland; dialogue in truth and freedom; national dignity; dignity and the fundamental human rights]. A play on positive emotions was visible in the electoral spots broadcast on tv and the radio when typical Polish landscapes, cityscapes of well known cities were presented in the background together with musical motifs. This was the case e.g. of PSL [Polish Peasants' Party] spots during which *Rota* was sung, while voters and candidates of PO [Citizens' Platform] were emotionally supported by the tenor singer Marek Torzewski singing a hit *Do przodu, Polsko!* [Forward, Poland!] known already from the Football Championships (2002). Samoobrona continually took advantage of the song *Ten kraj jest nasz i wasz. Nie damy bić się w twarz* [The country is ours and yours, we will not let you slap us in the face]. Electoral conventions of the different parties took place in places meaningful for Poles, cf. the beginning of the electoral campaign of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice] at the National Museum in Sukiennice [Cloth Halls] in Kraków where the speaker's stand was placed, significantly, in front of Jan Matejko's painting *Hold pruski* [the Prussian homage]. Platforma Obywatelska initiated the campaign amidst books at the home of the new National Library in Warsaw.

Negative emotional messages appeared mainly in the spots by euro-sceptics who criticized supporters of the Union, cf:

(10) *Polish public finances are in the state of ruin while the European Union is on the verge of bankruptcy. Nothing good comes out of uniting two bankrupts.*

(11) *Times are coming when the biggest threats are located at the European Parliament because people who have sold their home coun-*

¹⁰ Cf. J. Puzynina, *Język wartości*, Warszawa 1992.

try are pushing to get there. LPR [Polish Families' League] will not sell its home country ever!

Grave accusations were spelled during the campaign as well as derogatory expressions and verbal abuses targeted at those who in one way or another participated in political power after 1989, cf: *thieves, euro-renegades, scams, traitors, liars, degenerated political elites, they want to move to Brussels and Strasbourg to make big money; their task was to sell Poland out to the West and now they are escaping to the European Parliament which is their reward, [not] political expulsion; the European Parliament not for the traitors.*

During the first Polish electoral campaign for the EP, elements of folk, marketplace playfulness were used. Sometimes playful and witty texts were created, which is called carnivalization of electoral behaviour. Candidates hoped that such informal, joyful atmosphere would positively influence their perception by voters. „Merry vehicles” were driven which praised candidates, who themselves participated in feasts, picnics, visited marketplaces, talked up casual passers-by. Various gifts were handed out, people were treated to simple meals, balloons with emblems of parties or names of candidates rose up in the air. Such persuasive operations were also visible in some written materials, cf: *We are going to vote for B., because when he wins we will milk the Union; Let us vote for a **strong woman!** We appeal to acquaintances and friends. On Sunday, 13 June go to vote for Mrs. Jolanta Slaby; A. K. is a real skirt-wearing sheriff. They say about her: Where the devil cannot, he will send K.*

Key words during the campaign included: *Poland, Polish, region, development, funds, opportunity, sovereignty, to lobby, re-negotiations.* Only towards the end of the listing: *Europe, European, Union.* The word *Brussels* was always negatively charged.

In sum, the analyzed electoral documents of the first Polish campaign preceding the EP elections confirm the opinion expressed by numerous observers of the Polish political life, namely that it was weak and incompetent. Old schemata were reproduced during the campaign, Polish issues, usually regional, constituted its focal points, appeals to emotions were frequent, both positive and negative (anti-Union). Candidates experienced difficulties in distinguishing between what was European and what was Polish in their persuasive texts. The campaign was mainly focused on Polish issues. All participants repeated during the campaign schemata known from earlier campaigns. In the promises

they made, self-presentations, slogans, photographs with party bosses, e.g. with Andrzej Lepper or J. Kaczyński, programmes of action, they behaved as if they were competing for seats in the Polish Sejm or Senate or even for mandates in local government. No wonder then that the campaign proved to be ineffective, as evidenced by the low number (20%) of votes cast. Those who voted decided in advance to vote for a chosen candidate (party); those who did not, would have to be persuaded by persuasive operations.